



# FEMA

## *Defensible Space and Fire-Resistant Building Materials Save Home from Wildfire*

**Ramona, CA** - On Sunday, October 21, 2007, Lisa LeFors of Ramona, CA heard the startling news about the Witch Fire advancing toward her home and started making arrangements to evacuate. She monitored the radio all day and night, and finally, at 2:00 a.m., she gathered up her two dogs and one cat and fled her home.

The Santa Ana winds stoked 23 separate Southern California wild fires to a virtual fire storm for four days before subsiding enough to allow fire fighters to contain the flames and ultimately extinguish them.

LeFors's adobe ranch-style house was built in 1990 with protection from wildfire danger considered in its design and construction. Besides the noncombustible adobe brick and concrete tile roof, the fire-resistant exterior doors are metal with dual pane glass. The windows, also dual pane, either have metal clad frames or are of glass block.

Because the house is set in approximately the middle of her 10-acre plot, the land is kept relatively clear around the home's perimeter. Ice plant, which does not burn, grows close to the house, and brick and concrete walkways separate the house from other planted areas. There is evidence of the fire's scorching only up to the edge of the ice plant growth.

When she realized that evacuation was probable, the first thing LeFors did was to clear out the accumulation of leaf debris from under her propane tank that sits about thirty feet from her house. Between the house and propane tank is a four-foot-high adobe patio wall running the depth of the house. This wall also serves as a fire-break.

LeFors keeps vegetation outside of the immediate perimeter of her house mowed very short with a tractor mower to prevent it becoming a fire hazard.

One neighbor who stayed in his home instead of evacuating told LeFors when she returned that the flames burned for about two hours before moving on through the neighborhood. Another neighbor's home burned completely to the ground. LeFors is positive that her house would have burned also if not for the mitigation measures built into her home.

As she was cleaning up after the fire, she found cinders on the exterior window sills, evidence that the fire resistant sills and metal clad window frames prevented the fire from entering the structure.

Having avoided the loss of her property, currently valued at \$400,000, during this fire, LeFors is now planning to implement additional mitigation measures. Her first priority will be to enclose the overhanging eaves with non-combustible materials. She also plans to remove more of the foundation plantings and some trees that are too close to the house.



San Diego County,  
California



### Quick Facts

Sector:

**Private**

Cost:

**Amount Not Available**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Building Codes**

Primary Funding:

**Property Owner, Residential**